



Mr. Ford's Page

EVERY little while the old question is brought up again—"Does Education Educate?"—and we have more or less entertaining demonstrations of the ignorance of college students, the illiteracy of the reading public, numerous diverting tests of knowledge, and debates concerning the difference between wisdom and learning.

It is one of our favorite sports, this habit of getting fun out of the question of knowledge: we make fun of men who never went to college, because they did not go; and we make fun of men who went to college, because going did apparently so little for them.

There never was and probably never will be a system devised that will put brains into men's heads, and until such a system appears we must expect to find in men the same differences that have always marked them, whether with books or without them, in or out of college.

Take a group of wholly illiterate men, men who cannot read a date on the calendar, who cannot write their own names, and you will find a difference in brain power among them. Equally illiterate, one man will exhibit more native intelligence; he has brains even if he has little book knowledge; he has foresight, insight, initiative; he knows what he knows, and, therefore, possesses confidence and a sense of mastery.

Passing that group through college would probably not change the comparative brain values; one would still be brighter than the others. The average of ability might be raised, but there would be no essential enlargement of native brain power.

Just as there are some stones that will not take a polish, so there are minds that cannot be standardized so far as knowledge and the ability to use it is concerned.

An able man is a man who can do things, and his ability to do things is dependent on what he has in him, and what he has in him depends on what he started with and what he has done to increase and discipline it.

An educated man is not one whose memory is trained to carry a few dates in history, but one whose mind can accomplish things. A man who cannot think is not an educated man, however many college degrees he may have acquired. Thinking is the hardest work any one can do, which is probably the reason we have so few thinkers.

There are two extremes to be avoided; one is the attitude of contempt toward education, the other is the tragic snobbery of assuming that marching through an educational system is a sure cure for ignorance and mediocrity. One benefit that education can confer on a man is to give him an equal start with his fellows. Sometimes even that is not an advantage, but in the main and for the general run of human beings, perhaps it is. You cannot learn in any school what the world is going to do next year, but you can learn some of the things which the world has tried to do in former years, and where it failed, and why it succeeded.

If education consisted in warning the young student of some of the exploded false theories on which men have tried to build, so that he may be saved the loss of time in finding this out by bitter experience, its good would be unquestioned. One sees a great deal along this line among the amateur inventors of the day. Inventors, by the way, are not made by education, but if they have enough education to save them from putting away over the mistakes that have been conclusively proved to be mistakes, it saves them time. There are men at work today on theories fundamentally wrong, but they do not know that other men have followed that road and have had to come back. An education which consisted of signposts indicating the failures and the fallacies of the past, doubtlessly would be very useful. If education had as its objective the putting of the student in possession of the world up-to-date, so that

leaving the school he could start in step with humanity, it would be a great service. But whether this is the objective, it may be better to let educators themselves decide.

It is not education and it is not learning to be in possession of the theories of a lot of professors who do not know and never will know. Speculation is very interesting, and sometimes profitable, but it is not education. To be learned in science today is merely to be aware of a hundred theories that have not been proved. And not to know what those theories are is to be "uneducated," "ignorant," and so forth. But neither the man who knows these theories nor the man who does not know them, really *knows* anything. If knowledge of guesses is learning, then one may become learned by the simple expedient of making his own guesses, and by the same token he can dub the rest of the world "ignorant" because it does not know what his guesses are.

But the best that education can do for a man is to put him in possession of his powers, give him control of the tools with

which destiny has endowed him, and teach him how to think. The college renders its best service as an intellectual gymnasium, in which mental muscle is developed and the student strengthened to do what he can.

To say, however, that mental gymnastics can only be had in college is not true, as every educator knows. A man's real education begins after he has left school, as any university graduate will tell you. True education is gained through the discipline of life.

The trouble is not with the schools altogether (though their one-sidedness in filling the field with books and leaving no place for the training of eye and ear and hand is recognized), but with the public illusion that schools can do for a young man what he must do for himself. If young men come out of college uneducated it is their own fault, and the same would be true if it were a canning factory they came out of, or a boiler shop, or anywhere else. Any place, any work offers an opportunity for education, but it is something the recipient takes, it is not something that can be handed to him.

Here is a farmer boy working in the greatest school that ever existed, walking all day long on the greatest textbook ever written. If he could master the secrets of one acre, or even one square foot of land, he would be a learned man. There are more things to be learned on one farmstead than in Harvard, Yale and Princeton put together; though it sometimes occurs that the young man doesn't

know this until he has gone through school first.

We are a nation of casual readers. We read to escape thinking. Reading has become a dope habit with us. Learning has become a thing of accent and of facts. It is "learning" to have read the latest novel, but not to know that it's a silly, trivial thing. It is "learning" to have looked into this or that book-suffocated man's speculation, but not to know that he would be a wiser man and have more wholesome blood coursing through his brain if he would take a hammer or an ax and get out where he could sense life. Book-sickness is the modern ailment. There's more wisdom in the shop where men deal with real materials and real persons every day.

What can you do to help and heal the world?—that is the educational test. If a man can hold up his own end, he counts for one. If he can help ten or a hundred or a thousand other men hold up their ends, he counts for more. He may be quite rusty on many things that inhabit the realm of print, but he is a learned man just the same. When a man is master of his own sphere, whatever it may be, he has won his degree—he has entered the realm of wisdom.

THEY are at it again, trying to determine when a man is educated. A man is educated when he knows how to do what he can do, and extract from his performance a sufficient economic, intellectual and spiritual satisfaction. A man who cannot do that is not educated, no matter what his knowledge of books may be. That man is best educated who knows the greatest number of things that are so, and who can do the greatest number of things to help and heal the world. Schools are useful only as they put men in possession of their own powers; and they cannot do this without the earnest desire of their students to be so helped. Any man can learn anything he will, but no man can teach except to those who want to learn. Education is pre-eminently a matter of quality, not amount.